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RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 2118
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RUEAWJC/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
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SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: GANGS ON THE RISE IN SAO PAULO'S WOMEN'S PRISONS

REF: A) Brasilia 496; (B) Sao Paulo 215; (C) 05 Sao Paulo 975

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: According to the Director of Training for the Sao Paulo state prison system, street gang influence within Sao Paulo prisons has notably increased over the last three years. Particularly disturbing in this trend is that for the first time, prison officials see the influence of gangs within the state's women's prisons, specifically of the notorious street gang First Capital Command (PCC). The rise of gang influence begets a corresponding rise in the availability of cell phones, drugs, and weapons in prison, smuggled in by family members of inmates via corrupt prison officials. On a related note, the official indicated that Sao Paulo prison administrators were aware of the State Department's Human Rights Report coverage of poor conditions in Brazil's prisons, but surmised that there would be little reaction to it because the reporting was accurate and depressingly familiar. Improvement does occur, but incrementally. END SUMMARY.

PCC IN WOMEN'S PRISONS

12. (SBU) On March 9, Poloffs met with Francisco de Assis Santana, Director of Training for the Sao Paulo prison system. He oversees programs that train a wide segment of prison employees, including guards and rapid reaction teams. The small but relatively modern school is located in a mix of prison-related buildings on the north side of the city of Sao Paulo, and Santana noted that the Secretary of Prison Administration, Nagashi Furukawa, has recently re-located the Secretariat of Penitentiary Administration (SAP) to this complex. These administrative buildings lie in the shadow of the Women's Penitentiary of Sant'Ana, and a few blocks from the crumbling remains of the notorious Carandiru Prison, scene of an infamous bloody clash between inmates and the Military Police in 1992 (Refs A and B) in which 111 prisoners died.

13. (SBU) Santana freely discussed the state of prisons in Sao Paulo, focusing on the women's prisons. (NOTE: According to SAP statistics, Sao Paulo state currently incarcerates 4266 women inmates. END NOTE.) He focused on the rising influence of street gangs in women's prisons, which he said was virtually non-existent even a year ago. Unwilling to use the term "gangs," preferring to

call them "factions," he said the notorious street gang PCC (Ref C) in particular has taken hold in the state's women's prisons.

PHONES, DRUGS AND GUNS

¶4. (SBU) Santana said that as a result of the rise in the PCC's influence, prison officials note a corresponding rise in the availability of cell phones, drugs and guns within prison walls. He said the families and associates of inmates smuggle these items into the prisons, usually with the complicity of corrupt prison officials. He described how cell phones are ferried to inmates by prison employees throughout the state's prison system, usually for a payoff of around 300 Reais per phone (approximately \$150 USD). Santana said a prison dentist was recently caught with several phones strapped to his legs that he was trying to smuggle to inmates. Cell phones are hot commodities because they are used by imprisoned gang leaders to coordinate criminal activity both within the prison and out on the streets (Ref C). Santana offered no specific government plan to combat the rise of the PCC's influence, other than to continue programs like his to better train staff and to root out corruption.

MUTED REACTION TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

¶5. (SBU) On a related matter, Santana made a point of showing us copies of Brazilian press coverage of the Department's 2005 Human Rights Report, which again criticized Brazil's prisons. When asked directly what he and his superiors thought of the Report, he shrugged and said simply, "What can I say. It's all true." He said

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he did not expect any reaction to the report from prison administrators. (NOTE: GOB policy is to not comment publicly on the Human Rights Report. END NOTE.) He said prison management in Brazil is not easy, but he sees improvements. For example, he noted that at Presidente Bernardes Penitentiary outside of the city of Sao Paulo, the prison's construction is such that cell phone signals cannot penetrate the walls (Ref C), and he said new retinal scanners screen visitors to prevent gang members from gaining access to incarcerated associates by masquerading as family.

PUBLIC SECURITY AND PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNING

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: The rising influence of the PCC in women's prisons follows a trend of the gang's influence in Sao Paulo state generally over the last 12 months (Ref C). Born in the state's prisons, the PCC has become a highly organized and business-like entity. Public security is likely to be an election issue, and with trends such as this, neither the president nor the governor of Sao Paulo will find it easy to take the high road when it comes to prison administration and security. END COMMENT.

¶7. (U) This cable was cleared/coordinated with Embassy Brasilia.

MCMULLEN